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Atari Online News, Etc.
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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, another successful turkey feast at the Jacobson household! It almost didn't happen this year due to the fact that I came down with a nasty cold some time on Wednesday. I woke up Thursday morning, and really didn't want to do anything but stay in bed! But, my determination to pull off a great turkey meal won out, and I managed to get through it. I started the preparation around 11:00 a.m., had "bird-zilla" in the oven just after noon, and we were sitting down enjoying an early dinner a little before 3:30 in the afternoon. Yes Joe, that's only a little over three hours to cook a 15-pound bird! Many years ago, my mother taught me the secrets of the "high-heat" method of cooking turkey. None of this slow roasting for half a day for me!

So, the four of us (my wife, and two dogs - Sam's first Thanksgiving!) enjoyed turkey, real stuffing (not that packaged dry crap!), whipped potatoes and gravy, cranberry sauce (yeah, the kind out of a can!), rolls, and a variety of olives and stuff. We each had seconds, and wanted to save room for pie - I picked up two "non-traditional" pies for a change: a banana cream and chocolate cream pies.

I resisted the temptation to raid the fridge later that night because I was scheduled to work today. As it turned out, I felt like crap this morning, so I called in sick. Now we all know that the universal cure-all is chicken soup! So, I heated up some chicken broth, and added some meat tortellini and - you guessed it - some leftover turkey. I still had the cold, but I felt a little better about it! Of course, I had a full plate, and then some, of more turkey and all the rest of the fixin's for dinner tonight. I have a feeling that I might raid the fridge later on tonight, but don't tell my wife!

I hope that you all had an enjoyable Thanksgiving holiday, surrounded by family and/or friends. It's a great time of the year, with the exception of knowing that for the next four weeks we'll be barraged with Christmas commercials everywhere we go! We'll survive, somehow.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, I 'survived' another Thanksgiving Day. Of course, I'm a few pounds heavier on this side of the holiday, but that's what holidays are for, right? After all, I love turkey. It's one of nature's most perfect foods. Along with stuffing and mashed potatoes and gravy, everything a middle-aged man needs to hasten a... ummmm... coronary event. [chuckle]

I'm afraid that I must admit that I went rather heavily on the food this holiday. I started the day off at my parents' house where, after forty-something years, my mother has decided to let my sister take charge of Thanksgiving dinner. Living a mere mile or so from my parents, it's not much of a change... except for my sister.

Now, remember that I come from a large family, being the eldest of 7 children... and if I remember correctly, all of them and their families make it to my sister's for dinner... except for me. I go to my sister-in-law's. Hey, just doing what I can to help take some of the load off my sister. [chuckle]

So anyway, I went to my parents' house Thanksgiving morning and, of course, my mother had roasted a whole turkey ANYWAY! Yep, a whole turkey with stuffing and mashed and gravy and cranberry sauce. But that wasn't all... she also made about half a dozen pies... pumpkin, lemon meringue (my mother makes what is probably the finest lemon meringue pie the world has ever seen), banana creme and chocolate creme.

She used to make a couple of apple pies for the holidays too, but stopped right around the time that I mentioned to her that apple was my favorite. Hmmmm

So, yeah, I had a plate of turkey (I love turkey!) and stuffing and mashed potatoes and gravy and cranberry sauce (the REAL kind... the kind you slide out of the can). I even went back and had seconds. And that was before 11:00 AM.

Then it was off to my sister-in-law's for the 'real' dinner, where I again stuffed myself with turkey (which was just as good as my mother's) and stuffing (which wasn't) and all the trimmings. I had seconds there too, because, well, I love turkey. [grin]

When I got home after dinner, the first thing I did was... yeah, you guessed it... thought about left-overs. That, as Dana can/will tell you, is the problem with having holiday dinner at someone else's house... no left-overs. It wasn't long before I was rummaging around the refrigerator and cupboards, looking for anything even remotely turkey flavored. [Helpful tip: If you're looking for something reminiscent of turkey, dry chicken bullion is NOT what you're looking for... yuck]

Okay, so now it's evening and I'm bemoaning the fact that there is no turkey anywhere in the house.

Well, that's not exactly true. There IS turkey in the house. You see, we'll (read "I will") be roasting our turkey on Saturday. It's 17+ lbs, and it's sitting in the refrigerator, taunting me.

Normally, if I were roasting the turkey for your average "sit down at one o'clock" meal, I'd have the turkey in the oven the night before, roasting slowly, filling the whole house with the aroma of turkey and stuffing, driving me insane for hours and hours. But as it is, we'll be having it as our evening meal, and late in the evening to boot. So I'll put it into the oven sometime in the late morning or early afternoon. Maybe that way I'll won't just lay there and inhale that airborne bliss the whole time. Naaaaaaaaaaaaah, I'll probably just hang around the oven the whole time, that glazed look in my eyes, drooling like a dumber Homer Simpson mumbling "mmmmmm, turkeyyyyyyyyyy".

So... yeah, it's been a good holiday for me. I even managed to drop off some canned and dry goods to the local soup kitchen. Things are tough out there this year, and I imagine that their stores are depleted... again, friends, it doesn't have to be a lot, and don't do it thinking you're going to change someone's life. Just grab an extra can or jar or box of something when you're in the grocery store and save 'em up or even just drop stuff off when you're driving by your church or temple or synagogue, your local homeless shelter or a soup kitchen. It really is a good feeling to walk into a place you've never been in before and just place a box or jar or can on the table for them, and turn around and go back to your car without a word. You're the Lone Ranger, you're the Caped Crusader, you're... oh hell, whoever your favorite superhero is. And if you can swing it, slip a couple of bucks into an envelope and include it... give it to whoever you have to give it to. If they're at the soup kitchen, shelter or place of worship, I think you can pretty much just leave it with them in with confidence.

Like I said, you're not going to change anyone's life... unless you're Bill Gates or Oprah, that is, but you CAN help. And, on a purely selfish note, it feels pretty damned good.

Okay, Harry, I'm doin' what I can. Happy now? [If you've read a lot of my columns, you know what I'm talking about. If not, well, let's just say that I'm keeping a promise I made years ago.]

Now go, all you turkey-eatin' sons of guns, and scavenge for those scraps of bird, the crumbs of stuffing, the dribs and drabs of gravy and enjoy that last yummy sandwich. And don't worry, there'll be more turkey (if you're lucky) for Christmas.

That's all for this week, friends and neighbors. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

'Avatar' Video Game To Expand Film's Alien World

James Cameron was thinking beyond the big screen when he created the alien world of Pandora. The "Titanic" director worked in tandem with video game developer Ubisoft Montreal on the game based on his upcoming sci-fi epic "Avatar."

Opening Dec. 18, the film stars Sam Worthington as a paralyzed human soldier who takes on the form of an exotic blue-skinned alien species called Na'vi on their home world Pandora, a remote paradise teeming with freaky flora and fauna.

"James Cameron did something really smart," said Kevin Shortt, story designer of "Avatar: The Game." "When he started preproduction on the movie three-and-a-half years ago, he said, 'I want a game. I know I want a game. I want them working on it right now.' Because, what often happens is they make the movie, and then somebody says, 'Hey, let's tack on a game.'"

In a plot that diverges from the film's story line, players can portray either a blade-wielding member of the Na'vi or a gun-toting human soldier for the Resources Development Administration, a massive organization that mines Pandora's rare natural resources. The game's parallel narratives explore the implications of aligning with either the Na'vi or RDA.

"Let's face it," Cameron said at the Electronic Entertainment Expo earlier this year. "Games derived from movies, historically, some of them have kind of sucked. And I didn't want 'Avatar' - I didn't want anything associated with 'Avatar' - to suck. So I proposed to Ubisoft this theory that the game should not be a slave to the movie."

Because "Avatar: The Game" is scheduled for release on Dec. 1 - over two weeks before the movie opens - dedicated fans can absorb details about Cameron's otherworldly creation before they see the film. That includes taking a peek at the game's comprehensive database of characters, creatures, vehicles and other minutia that will unravel as players progress.

"It's not just a repeat of the story," said Shortt, who worked also on the "Lost: Via Domus" game. "It's a rich, full experience itself that builds on the world that Cameron already created. We've got our Pandorapedia, which gives all these extra details for fans that they're not going to get anywhere else. This is the first place you're going to get them."

Atari, one of the world's most recognized brands, announced Tuesday the phase one re-launch of Atari.com. Gaming fans will have the opportunity to play Atari's legendary, addictive coin-op arcade and 2600 classics in the new Atari Arcade for free, get information on Atari's most recent and upcoming releases, buy games through the Atari Store via box or digital download, access exclusive merchandise, and enter contests and more through the newly designed Atari.com web site.

In the Atari Arcade fans can play free games such as Asteroids, Adventure, Battlezone, Crystal Castles, Lunar Lander and Yars Revenge. The classics, often replicated but never improved upon, appear in their complete original forms. The Arcade includes worldwide leader boards where gamers can see how they stack up and compete against others.

"Today commences the first stage in Atari's ongoing commitment to growing its online business with the re-launch of Atari.com," said Jim Wilson, President and CEO of Atari, Inc. "Our online roadmap contains a multitude of enhancements and exciting new features which over time will redefine how people play and connect with Atari."

At Atari.com, consumers will also have the opportunity to purchase exclusive apparel featuring the iconic Atari full logo as well as benefit from exclusive discounts on game bundles and shipping discounts on multiple purchases to enjoy the company's current blockbuster titles such as the mega hit Ghostbusters: The Video Game, which has already sold more than one million copies, and the critically acclaimed massively multiplayer title, Champions Online. Games will be available in digital download format as well as box copies. Additionally, members of the Atari community will be able to keep up to date on news and announcements on upcoming titles, such as the highly anticipated Star Trek Online and Project Runway.

To coincide with the launch of the site, fans in the United States will have the opportunity to win an exclusive Atari T-shirt in a design which will never be sold, repeated, or made available again. The site was redesigned in collaboration with the award-winning digital production studio Fantasy Interactive (f-i.com). From offices in New York City and Stockholm, Fantasy has spent over a decade building award-winning experiences for top clients including Electronic Arts, Porsche, Nintendo, Ikea, and Joost.

The Atari Arcade will also be joined by collaboration with the leading multiplayer game site OMGPOP on 'Missile Command', to be released in early 2010. OMGPOP, a recent winner of TIME Magazine's 50 Best Websites of 2009, is lending their uniquely addictive game style and social gaming expertise to bring this highly recognized classic to an ever broader audience.

For more information on the new Atari.com site, please visit www.atari.com.

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Mozilla Launches Thunderbird 3.0 Release Candidate

Most people are currently focused on another kind of bird that starts with a "T", but Mozilla on Wednesday issued the release candidate of its next-generation mail, feed, and newsgroup reader, Thunderbird 3.0.

Though it's technically still a pre-release version, Release Candidate 1 is feature complete. Based on the Gecko 1.9.1.5 engine, which also powers Mozilla's Firefox, the major enhancements in version 3 of the mail reader are a tabbed interface and archiving capability.

The new version has also been greatly simplified for average users, too. Adding an e-mail account is in most cases now a simple matter of entering your name, e-mail address, and password. And the main interface shows but four icons up top - Get Mail, Write, Address Book, and Tag, making e-mail communication dead simple.

Also new is a search box that graphically shows how many messages contain a particular search term over time. Search can also be refined by filters such as by sender, tag, attachments, people, folder, and mailing list. Search also includes auto-complete for when you're searching for a contact, and can work across multiple inboxes, as does the new Smart Folders view.

Thunderbird is also integrated with Windows Vista's integrated system search and Mac's Spotlight search.

The release candidate also includes performance improvements, not only from the new version of Gecko, but also through more intelligent, background IMAP folder synchronization.

Versions of the new mail reader are available for download free from Mozilla. Supported platforms include Windows 7, Vista, Server 2003, XP, and 2000, as well as Mac OS X 10.4 or later, and Linux.

Meet AOL's (Sorry, Aol's) New Logos

Freed from its oppressive Time Warner overlords, AOL is understandably undergoing something of an identity crisis. The company this week is showcasing "its new brand identity for its future as an independent company committed to creating the world's most simple and stimulating content and online experiences."

So, what's a new AOL look like? A capital "A" lowercase "o" and "l" and a period, on top of rotating background images - a goldfish, the metal sign, and a purple thing that appears to be the inside of a lava lamp.

"Our new identity is uniquely dynamic," said the company's chief executive, Tim Armstrong, in a statement. "Our business is focused on creating world-class experiences for consumers and AOL is centered on creative and talented people - employees, partners, and advertisers. We have a clear strategy that we are passionate about and we plan on standing behind the AOL brand as we take the company into the next

decade."

The company hired "global brand and innovation consultancy" Wolff Olins to design the logos.

AOL did not include any comment on its recent, substantial layoffs, which will claim roughly a third of its workforce, or about 2,500 jobs.

Holiday Web Shopping Looks Brighter than Last Year

Internet retailers hope the convenience of the Web, plus discounts and deals, spur still-nervous shoppers to spend more online this holiday season - even as traditional retailers brace for mediocre sales.

Internet analysts at comScore Inc. expect online retail revenue to rise 3 percent to \$28.8 billion for the months of November and December. That includes the Web sites of traditional retailers, such as Macy's, but excludes auctions, travel and large corporate purchases.

Meanwhile, U.S. holiday retail sales - excluding online - are expected to drop 1 percent from last year, according to the National Retail Federation, the largest retail trade group.

Online estimates and data-gathering methods vary, but e-commerce analysts and Web retailers agree: This year can't possibly be as bad as last year, when the shock of the financial meltdown was still fresh for consumers. ComScore charted a 3 percent drop for Web retail that holiday season - the first such decline since it started tracking the category in 2001.

Much of the growth expected in online shopping - which now accounts for about 7 percent of overall retail sales, according to Forrester Research - is attributed to one factor in particular: Shopping online is a major time saver. You can sidestep crowds, compare prices and ship gifts anywhere without leaving your couch or taking off your bunny slippers.

Jennifer Lankford, 28, expects to buy gifts on the Web for her young cousins and boyfriend this year, saying she hates waiting in lines.

"I can only spend so much time in stores or in a mall before I need to get out of there," she said.

For Lankford and many other consumers, online shopping is also synonymous with bargains. Steep discounts and free shipping are expected to be the norm this holiday season.

eBay Inc. is trying to woo customers to its huge online marketplace by focusing on holiday deals that include free shipping and guaranteed returns on new items from sellers.

It also is promoting products that are new but not necessarily the latest and greatest. On billboards in San Francisco, for example, eBay reminds consumers they can save money by buying last year's models. That should appeal to shoppers who want to be frugal but still desire name-brand products such as Garmin navigation units, said Lorrie Norrington, president of eBay marketplaces.

EBay and other e-commerce sites may also get a boost from shoppers who turn to the Web for items that can be hard to find at "brick-and-mortar" stores.

One hot product - the \$10 Zhu Zhu Pets interactive mechanical hamster - is already sold out at many traditional stores. You'll have to shell out several times as much to get them online, but they are still available on Amazon, eBay and other Web sites, through third-party sellers.

Big retailers such as Toys R Us Inc. and Best Buy Co. also are using the Web, especially social sites like Facebook, to steer buyers to discounts. Forrester analyst Sucharita Mulpuru said more companies are giving out coupon codes on Twitter in particular.

That approach might be becoming more widespread not only because it helps retailers reach customers, but also because the method's effectiveness is easily tracked.

Analysts also think consumers will be spending even more time perusing sites with coupons and deals, comparing prices and reading reviews.

"People want to make sure they're getting the best deals they can get," Mulpuru said.

Perhaps no Web retailer has been as successful at convincing consumers that it has bargains as Amazon, which managed to shrug off the recession last year and reported what it called its "best ever" holiday season. Amazon's fourth-quarter revenue rose 18 percent to \$6.7 billion last year.

The company expects even better growth this year. Current best-selling items range from Amazon's own \$259 Kindle electronic reading device to a \$30 Lego City advent calendar.

Paul Ryder, Amazon's vice president of consumer electronics, said that the economy seems more stable now than it did a year ago, when reluctant shoppers caused a bit of retailer panic.

"This season is not like that," he said, "but I think every retailer recognizes that customers are watching their pennies."

Keep Your Passwords Private - and Handy - With LastPass

This fall, more than 20,000 stolen usernames and passwords for such Webmail providers as AOL, Gmail, Hotmail, and Yahoo appeared on Pastebin.com, a programmer's Website.

The Webmaster, Paul Dixon, wrote that "for reasons unknown," some "miscreants" posted the data on his site. Dixon removed the stolen info, which Microsoft and some security researchers theorize was gathered through phishing attacks.

A researcher at ScanSafe argues that the data may have come from password-stealing malware, not phishing. Either way, crooks clearly aren't after only bank accounts and other financial log-ins. They also want access to your Webmail. But why? A friend of mine was recently hit by a scam, and her experience helps answer that question. After her Hotmail account was hacked, every message she sent included an unwelcome advertisement.

Crooks have also begun using stolen Webmail and Facebook accounts to send pleas supposedly from a victim to friends or contacts. Some bogus messages claim the sender is stranded overseas and needs an urgent wire transfer of funds.

To guard against password thieves, I use LastPass. The tool offers a free password-managing add-on for Firefox on Windows, Linux, or Mac OS X; Internet Explorer on Windows; and Safari on Mac OS X. An add-on for Google Chrome is under development.

LastPass fills in your username and password for verified sites that match a real URL; phishing scams that use similar but fake Web addresses won't deceive it. And because you don't type your password, keylogger malware can't capture your keystrokes and nab your password.

Other apps, like Password Hash, offer similarly worthwhile protection, but LastPass stores all of your data on its servers (using 256-bit AES encryption) as well as on your PC. Since the company never has the software decryption key or your password, nobody at LastPass can get to your info.

Because your data is stored centrally, you can use the add-on with any browser, log in with your LastPass master account info, and access all of your passwords. Even without the add-on, you can log in to LastPass's site to get to your information. That means you should create a fairly complex master password for the LastPass site, but it also means you have a de facto backup if your PC goes kaput.

The handy add-on can automatically log you in to sites and can fill in forms, but for better security you should change some of its default settings. For instance, it normally keeps you logged in to your LastPass account for two weeks, even if you close and re-open the browser; to prevent someone from sitting at your desk and accessing your accounts, click Preferences and check Automatically logoff after idle. I set mine to log off my LastPass account after an hour.

It's also smart to require a password reprompt for sensitive accounts; the app will ask for your master password before filling in the username and password, even if you're already logged in. You can enable this when the add-on automatically asks if you want to save a newly entered password. LastPass offers applications for the iPhone, BlackBerry and other mobile devices, too, but those will cost you \$12 per year.

Apple Moves To Shut Down Psystar's Mac Cloning

Apple is getting more aggressive against a Mac clone company it has been battling in court. The technology giant asked a federal judge to close Psystar's Mac clone operation and ante up \$2.1 million in damages, court documents reveal.

Apple has been silent since U.S. District Court Judge William Alsup ruled in favor of Apple in a copyright suit against Psystar. In his Nov. 13 ruling, Alsup also ruled that Psystar violated the Digital Millennium Copyright Act by installing Apple's Mac OS X on the cloned computers it sold.

Alsup's order granted Apple's motion for a summary judgment and nullified a similar motion from Psystar, and marked a major defeat for the cloner. But Apple is seeking to drive the final nail into Psystar's infringement coffin.

On Monday, Apple filed a motion requesting Alsup to grant a permanent injunction. If granted, the injunction will force Psystar to stop selling computer bundled with Apple's Mac OS X.

The permanent injunction would also ban Psystar from using, selling or owning software that makes it possible to crack Apple's OS encryption key, which would let it run Mac OS X on Psystar's hardware. Finally, the injunction would ban Psystar from "inducing, aiding or inducing others in infringing Apple's copyright."

Apple insists a permanent injunction is its only option in the face of Psystar's continued copyright violations. "Psystar has announced its intention to continue infringing (and to contribute to the infringement of) Apple's copyrights in, and circumventing the technology protection measures in, the current upgrade of Mac OS X, version 10.6," Apple said.

But Apple isn't content with a permanent injunction against Psystar. The Mac maker is also seeking \$2.1 million in damages. Psystar isn't expected to be in a financial position to pay the damages, but Apple is making a point.

"Psystar's whole business is premised on stealing from Apple," the motion reads. "Psystar pirates Apple's software, circumvents Apple's technological protection measures, and illegally benefits from the goodwill and reputation Apple has built. Psystar's conduct, if permitted to continue, will both tarnish Apple's reputation for excellence and lead to the proliferation of copycats who also will free ride on Apple's investments, infringe Apple's intellectual property rights, and cause further irreparable injury."

Psystar had previously sued Apple in a Florida federal court, claiming it was running a monopoly. The Doral, Fla.-based Psystar accused Apple of forcing a tie between the Mac OS X operating system and Apple's hardware in the end-user licensing agreement. Psystar argued that Apple's EULA unlawfully restrained trade by barring users from installing its operating system on non-Apple hardware. The judge dismissed those charges last November.

As Michael Gartenberg sees it, Psystar's infringement was arrogant, clearly violating Apple's licensing terms and clearly daring Apple to file suit. Apple is doing what anyone would do in that position, said Gartenberg, a vice president at Interpret, protecting the value of its intellectual property.

"Given the fact that the court has already strongly favored Apple's position, it makes sense if you are Apple to get rid of this thorn in your side once and for all," Gartenberg said. "These people are ripping off Apple's intellectual property and trying to make a dollar of their hard work and, more importantly, in many ways diluting the brand experience they've spent hundreds of millions of dollars creating."

The Internet can be a powerful medium for politicians to get their message across but it is also a vital means for civilians to have a say in what politicians do, participants in a political conference say.

Andrew Rasiej, founder of the Personal Democracy Forum series, said tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube help people organize "in order to have an impact on the political process and to petition governments to be more responsive to their everyday needs."

Saturday's conference comes at a time when more and more people are using the Internet to have their say. Examples include simultaneous global protests on climate change, democracy activists using Twitter in Iran and a French campaign against legislation that threatened to cut people's Internet connection for downloading copyright-protected material.

Tom Steinberg, director of Britain's mySociety.org, said technology can succeed in more mundane matters, too.

He cited his FixMyStreet site, where people pressure local authorities to address complaints such as potholes and broken pipes - petitions he said might otherwise get lost in the bureaucracy.

Hong Kong Police Probe Second Facebook Suicide Group

Hong Kong police said Friday they are hunting the creator of a second Facebook group encouraging teenagers to commit suicide.

A force spokeswoman said experts from its Commercial Crime Bureau were investigating a social networking group named "I have to (practise) suicide" after a page with an almost identical name was exposed earlier this week.

"We are now investigating the two cases. No one has been arrested so far," she told AFP.

The new group emerged on Wednesday and nearly 100 people signed up, according to media reports.

"What is the meaning of life...my beloved is in love with another...while everything adults do is right, what we do is all wrong...no one knows we exist, why don't we all commit suicide?" the group wrote on its site.

It was created after the media reported this week that another Facebook group - "I have to practise suicide", with no brackets in the title - had called on its 190 members to kill themselves on December 21, and was linked to an attempted suicide.

The South China Morning Post said Friday that the police had already traced the creator of "I have to practise suicide".

It cited police sources saying the culprit was a local teenager who set up the site for fun.

The group came to light after police launched an investigation into the case of a 15-year-old boy who tried to throw himself off the roof of his

school two weeks ago. The boy was a member of the group.

Hong Kong Man, Three Others Jailed for Spam Scheme

A Hong Kong resident and three other men, including the self-proclaimed "Godfather of Spam," were sentenced to prison on Monday for their roles in an email stock fraud scheme, the Justice Department said.

The sentences, ranging from 32 to 51 months in prison, were handed down by US District Judge Marianne Battani in federal court in Detroit, the department said in a statement.

How Wai John Hui, 51, a resident of Hong Kong and Canada, was sentenced to 51 months in prison for wire fraud, money laundering and conspiring to commit wire fraud, mail fraud and to violate the Spam Act, it said.

Hui, the former chief executive of a company called China World Trade, was sentenced to three years of supervised release following his prison term and agreed to forfeit 500,000 dollars to the United States, it said.

Alan Ralsky, 64, of West Bloomfield, Michigan, and his son-in-law, Scott Bradley, 48, also of West Bloomfield, were sentenced to 51 months and 40 months in prison respectively on the same charges.

John Bown, 45, of Fresno, California, was sentenced to 32 months in prison for conspiring to commit wire fraud, mail fraud and to violate the Spam Act and conspiring to commit computer fraud, the Justice Department said.

"Today's sentencing sends a powerful message to spammers whose goal is to manipulate financial transactions and the stock market through illegal email advertisements," said assistant attorney general Lanny Breuer.

"People who use fraudulent emails to drive up stock prices and reap illicit profits will be prosecuted, and they will face significant prison time," Breuer said.

FBI special agent Andrew Arena said Ralsky, the self-proclaimed "Godfather of Spam," flooded email boxes with unwanted spam email and attempted to use a botnet to hijack computers to assist them in the scheme.

A botnet is a network of computers infected by malicious software.

According to court documents, the conspirators used spam emails to manipulate thinly traded stocks between January 2004 and September 2005.

They would profit by trading in the stocks once their share prices increased on purchases by recipients of the spam emails.

Spam King Gets More Than Four Years Behind Bars

One of the world's most notorious spammers has reached the end of the

road - or at least a rest stop - that could last for the next 51 months. Alan Ralsky, known as the spam king, was sentenced Tuesday to more than four years in prison by U.S. District Judge Marianne O. Battani in Detroit. In June, Ralsky pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and mail fraud, and to violations of the CAN-SPAM Act.

The case against Ralsky and a number of other defendants was brought mostly in the Eastern District of Michigan. The scheme focused on using spam to promote stocks for U.S. companies owned and controlled by people in Hong Kong and China, the U.S. Department of Justice said. The indictment focused on the period from January 2004 to September 2005.

The e-mails, according to the DOJ, contained false or misleading information and were sent via software that made it difficult to trace. Various strategies - including falsified headers, proxy computers (i.e. botnets), and falsely registered domain names - were used to evade antispyware software and entice recipients to read the bogus messages.

Henry Stern, senior security researcher at Cisco, applauded the sentencing. "My understanding of all the evidence that I've seen over the past number of years is that Mr. Ralsky is one of the founding fathers of modern spam," he said.

Ralsky's main innovation, according to Stern, significantly worsened the problem. "He was one of the first persons who used botnets for spam," Stern said. "That is going away from using their own hardware to using people's computers that are compromised with viruses. That was a big change in spamming, taking it from small scale to the spiraling snowball we have now, the massive spam volumes."

Mike Murray, chief information security officer for Foreground Security, said jailing Ralsky is a good thing, but the impact will be limited. "It's kind of like cockroaches," he said. "You kill one and two more take their place. [But] it's great to put this guy away, and it's great to see that there are some teeth behind CAN-SPAM and that we're seeing some action."

The good news, Stern said, is that progress is being made against spammers. "In the past year we have given them a number of setbacks and demonstrated that we have the ability, with the right amount of effort, to strike serious blows against spammers," he said. "We measured that spam coming out of the U.S. averaged over the entire year has gone down about 20 percent compared to last year. That proves antispyware and antibotnet efforts in the U.S. can be successful. We need to keep up the fight."

Murray agreed the tide is moving in the right direction. "We're making progress," he said. "The real progress is on the client side and raising the expense to spammers. Spam was essentially free in 1999. Now they have to pay for botnets [and other tools]. By raising their expense, we make spam less profitable. By making it less profitable, you make it less of a problem."

UFO-Obsessed Briton Loses Bid To Block US Extradition

A Briton accused of hacking into US military and NASA computers faces extradition to the United States after the British government Thursday

rejected last-ditch requests to block the move.

Home Secretary Alan Johnson said he concluded that sending Gary McKinnon to the United States would not breach his human rights, and has no general discretionary powers to stop the extradition.

"If Mr McKinnon's human rights would be breached, I must stop the extradition. If they would not be breached, the extradition must go ahead," Johnson said in a statement.

"As the courts have affirmed, I have no general discretion," he said.

McKinnon, who suffers from a form of autism, could spend life in prison if convicted by a US court of gaining access to 97 computers in 2001 and 2002 in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

McKinnon says he was only looking for evidence of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) when he hacked into the US Navy and NASA space agency computers.

Throughout the long-running case, McKinnon's lawyers have argued against extradited in part because he suffers from Asperger's Syndrome, and could commit suicide or suffer psychosis if it went ahead.

McKinnon's mother slammed the minister's decision as "barbaric".

Janis Sharp warned that the 43-year-old was terrified of extradition and the case has taken its toll on his mental health.

"To force a peaceful, vulnerable, misguided UFO fanatic like Gary thousands of miles away from his much-needed support network is barbaric," Sharp said.

"This is a cruel and miserable decision," she said, adding that the government, should "hang their heads in shame."

"If the severity of Gary's medical condition isn't sufficient to prevent his extradition, I can't imagine what is. God help others facing a similar fate."

His cause has drawn high-profile support, including from Trudie Styler, wife of rock star Sting, who urged Britons to write to the Home Secretary.

Last month, the High Court in London refused McKinnon leave to appeal to Britain's new Supreme Court against his extradition.

The Home Office agreed to study new medical evidence about McKinnon before deciding on his extradition.

But Johnson has since told McKinnon's family that he could not block the move on medical grounds.

He said however he had received guarantees from US authorities that McKinnon's medical needs would be met once extradited, and, if convicted, he would not serve any time in a "supermax" prison.

"Due to legitimate concerns over Mr McKinnon's health, we have sought and received assurances from the United States authorities that his needs will be met," Johnson said.

"Finally, should Mr McKinnon be extradited, charged and convicted in the US and seek repatriation to the UK to serve a custodial sentence, the government will, of course, progress his application at the very earliest opportunity."

McKinnon's solicitor said she would now seek a judicial review of Johnson's decision, and lodge an application before the High Court within seven days.

"We are certainly coming to the end of the road, but we are just hoping that at some point, someone sees sense and steps in," Karen Todner told the BBC.

"In some ways it's like dealing with a death row case, we genuinely believe Gary's life is at stake here."

His lawyers say he could easily be prosecuted in Britain, where he would face a less severe sentence. But the Crown Prosecution Service ruled in February that the case was best brought in the United States.

Hack In The Box Heading to Holland

The organizers of the Hack In The Box security conferences in Malaysia are planning their first European show for Amsterdam next July.

Hack In The Box (HITB) held its first security conference, or hacker convention, in Kuala Lumpur in 2003, one of the first major shows of its kind in Asia. HITB organizers added a show in the Middle East in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in 2007. The two shows run yearly and draw high profile security industry people every year.

Next year, HITB will host its first show in Amsterdam from July 5 to 8, according to Dhillon Andrew Kannabhiran, the head of HITB. The Amsterdam show, HITBSecConf2010 - Amsterdam, will follow a similar schedule to the other HITB exhibitions. There will be two days of training sessions and two days of the conference, complete with Web hacking competitions.

Hacking competitions feature in every HITB show and the winners used to receive cash awards from sponsors. But at HITB Malaysia this year, there was no prize money on offer due to lack of sponsorship of the event yet enough teams registered to fill the competition ticket.

"This was the first year we did not have any prize money for the winners yet we had a full house of registered teams. It goes to show that the 'hacking spirit' is not dead (yet) and that there are still those who are passionate about network security not because they get paid big bucks," said Kannabhiran.

He said HITB probably won't hold a show in Amsterdam when the popular Hacking at Random (HAR2009) security conference runs. HAR is held once every four years at an outdoor location near Vierhouten, Netherlands. Most attendees camp out in tents at the show.

HITB will host a total of three security conferences next year. The first show will open in Dubai April 19, followed by the Amsterdam show in July and then HITBSecConf2010 Malaysia October 11 to 14.

Canada Woman To Fight Insurance Company Over Facebook

A Canadian woman on sick leave for depression said Monday she would fight an insurance company's decision to cut her benefits after her agent found photos on Facebook of her vacationing, at a bar and at a party.

Nathalie Blanchard said Monday she was diagnosed with major depression and was receiving monthly sick-leave benefits until payments dried up this fall.

When Blanchard called her insurance provider, Manulife, to find out why, she says she was told the Facebook photos showed she was able to work.

"If you have insurance, be careful. This is a major battle and it's not going to be easy," Blanchard, 29, said in a telephone interview from her home in Bromont Quebec.

She said her insurance agent described several pictures Blanchard posted on Facebook, including ones showing her having a good time at a Chippendales bar show, at her birthday party and on a holiday.

Blanchard said Manulife told her it was evidence she is no longer depressed.

Her lawyer, Tom Lavin, said Blanchard was wrongfully dismissed from her benefits, and she had the right to go on a sunny vacation.

"The issue for me is that they stopped her disability benefits without the proper medical recommendations. Her doctor recommended she go on vacation," he said.

Blanchard said she took three four-day trips when she was feeling especially low, on her psychiatrist's advice.

Manulife declined to comment on the case specifically but has said in a statement that "we would not deny or terminate a valid claim solely based on information published on Web sites such as Facebook."

Still, Lavin said the issue raises concerns for anyone who expects their private life to remain so if they post personal information to social networking sites such as Facebook.

"It's good warning for people who use Facebook. It's not like being at home and writing in your diary. It's out there for the whole world to see," he said.

Blanchard's case will be before Quebec Superior Court Dec. 8.

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